



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

DISCUSSION

THE "AMERICAN IDEA" AND THE AMERICAN HIGH SCHOOL

Those of us who hold to the notion that education even in a democracy is concerned quite as much with creating as with abridging distinctions will welcome Professor Showerman's attack in the *March School Review* on the inadequate conception of education which too often passes current as "the American idea." Leadership has its greatest significance in a democracy, and it behooves us all to see to it that the prospective leaders get their just deserts.

Today the public high school is a school for all comers. It partakes of the character of a nursery, a hospital, and a reform school, as well as a club. Its ancient and honorable function as a sort of providential agent for the selection of the "fittest" is little thought of. Its "failures" are too many; its "losses" must be strictly accounted for. As in the roll-call on the battlefield, the only excuse which the high school finds really good for much in accounting for the "missing" is death. Everyone who, by hook or crook, can secure a grammar-school certificate must be "taken care of."

In the face of these demands is the secondary school in a mush of concession to give up all pretense of adequately training the best minds, in the hope that its duty shall be fully met when it accommodates its courses and its standards to the multiplicity of commonplace needs? Or by some new adjustment can the school stand for and honor supremely the indispensable rigor of discipline which alone is worth anything for strength of character as well as for true scholarship, even while it ministers to the needs of that abundant portion whose lot it is never to be scholarly?

All this investigation of retardation and elimination, this determined assault upon the "high percentage of failures," so far as it is other than a demand for quantity instead of quality in the output, simply means that, instead of being an institution designed to select those worthy of training, the school is an institution for giving everyone training of some sort. As such an institution the school can, of course, offer no excuse for failing to reach and care for the needs of any who may come. In such an institution every child is entitled to find his place, and the burden laid upon the school today is precisely this, that no capacity is to be ignored, no capability untouched, which, when found and developed, will make of a child a more useful member of society and a greater satisfaction to himself.

In endeavoring to fulfil such a mission the school has, of course, broadened its courses. In doing this it has failed to insist clearly and unequivocally upon the varying values of different studies, so that now we face

an opinion quite general enough that one study is as good as another. This absurdity of "harmonious equipotentiality," as Professor Showerman styles it, must be renounced in no uncertain terms by the high school which is to hold true to the needs of society and the pupil. The first step toward a truly democratic school adequately furnished for providing a training for the best minds as well as for the poorest is taken when frank recognition is made of the total lack of equivalence among various studies.

Then, too, it is difficult to see how any secondary school today can fully meet the demand of society that it provide a suitable training for all who come without creating not only broader courses but a greater variety of standards than most secondary schools ever dare openly to own. As a rule a certain arbitrary measure of a pupil's proficiency is deemed requisite for passing, for going on farther with studies of the same kind, for graduation, and for recommendation to higher schools. There are here, for example, four entirely distinct uses to which the proficiency mark may be put, but probably it has not occurred to many high-school principals that any distinction here was even possible. A failure to attain a certain standard may and usually does constitute a failure for any and all of the above purposes.

All that it is desired to emphasize here is this, that it is entirely possible to recognize varying standards of attainment more than is commonly done without resorting to the elimination of pupils from school through failure. The "hoi polloi" are upon us in the high schools. If any dislike the irruption and prefer to continue the hopeless task of eliminating the barbarians by setting impossible standards, let them persist in their method. Some, however, may choose not to fight against the stars in their courses.

Quite likely we schoolmasters, at least, need neither to deprecate nor to disparage but rather to recognize the fact that, whether we like it or not, the high school is rapidly becoming the school of all instead of the few. The scheme of varying standards of proficiency within the school may help to make it possible to realize a higher standard of scholarship together with a lower percentage of failures, to meet the needs of the commonplace, and, at the same time, to offer a genuinely liberal training to those able to profit by it. Constrained by society to be no longer exclusive but broadly hospitable, the school will be forced to become so efficient in developing varying capacities and aptitudes, in selecting and valuing courses and studies, in discovering differences, and in fostering distinctions, that it may be trusted not only to attend to its new function in our democracy of universalizing without demoralizing education but to continue its ancient and still indispensable function of selecting and training the fittest.

FRANK P. WHITNEY

GRENVILLE HIGH SCHOOL
CLEVELAND, OHIO